



"Every day I have a different experience with the children."

- Erika Gutierrez, Owner
Erika Gutierrez, Green Bay

Becoming a Child Care Professional

Fulfilling a Need

It is fitting that Erika Gutierrez's family child care program is named for her, given that it grew to fulfill a need she saw in her own family. Erika has twins, one who has autism, and found that she did not feel comfortable leaving her children in child care, knowing the specialized care that she wanted both of her children to receive. When she realized a friend of hers was also searching for child care, Erika decided to start her own child care program in 2010, becoming a licensed provider in 2011. Through the years YoungStar has played a significant role in supporting Erika through the process of building her child care business and expanding her knowledge of how to best support the children in her care. "YoungStar has helped a lot," emphasized Erika, adding that when she has doubts or questions about something to do with her program, whether it is business or child related, she can get those answered in the classes and trainings she continues to take through YoungStar, or by her Technical Consultant (TC), Cassy DeBauche. Thanks to YoungStar, Erika finds that she has learned how to better support the children in her care, including her own children, through age-appropriate activities that meet their individual needs. Having this knowledge has not only allowed her to improve her program environment, it has given her the language she needs to position herself as a professional in the field of early education so that she can build her business.

The Business of Child Care

Aside from learning and applying child development and early education knowledge in the classroom, one of the major benefits Erika has found in YoungStar is the business savvy she has gained. In the beginning of her program, she had very few formal policies in place. As such, there were times that she provided child care to families but did not get paid. Through the assistance of micro-grants, Erika has been able to write up a formal contract with the families enrolled in her program. She has also been able to create additional solid business practices and policies that hold her program and the families enrolled to specific standards. Erika has even explained YoungStar to her families and has been able to leverage that to build her business further. Upon achieving a 3 Star rating for her program, Erika decided to raise her rates slightly. She was able to explain this change to families in a way that made sense to them, since they understood her quality through YoungStar was increasing and that the pay change reflected that, and would be used to maintain and build quality in the program.

A 5 Star Journey

Overall, Erika has found the YoungStar process to be smooth and highly beneficial. Her TC adapts to her schedule and supports her program through any changes and activities that she pursues. Due to her program movement from a 2 to a 3 Star, her Wisconsin Shares subsidy reimbursement is no longer reduced by 5%, which has helped her with more effectively allocating funds for her business. Having her child care listed on the YoungStar website, with her rating, has also increased inquiries about enrollment for her child care. She started out with two children in her program and she now has a waiting list. Long term she is determined to continue her journey through YoungStar all the way to a 5 Star, and in the near future, plans to finish her associate degree in education, with a focus on working with children who have autism. She has only three more classes to complete.

Wisconsin's Stars are Shining

YoungStar informs parents, recognizes quality providers and brings resources and support to programs committed to improving quality. But what it's really all about is helping Wisconsin children shine bright.